The Order of the Lays in the ‘Odd’ Machaut Manuscript
BnF, fr. 9221 (E)

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Ne say comment commencier
Un tres doux lay ...
[I don’t know how to begin a sweet lay ...]1

Guillaume de Machaut’s lay output is considerable and spans his entire career. In many ways his lays can be considered to represent the apex, or at least the concretisation, of the genre. Machaut was singled out in the fifteenth century in a well-known anonymous source as ‘le grant rethorique de nouvelle fourme, qui commencha toutes tailles nouvelles et les parfais lays d’amours’ [the great rhetorician of the new form, who began all new forms, and the perfect lays of love].2 More recently, David Fallows in Grove Music Online states that ‘Machaut’s lais [sic] must be regarded as the highpoint of the form’s history’.3 Certainly, after Machaut, very few examples survive which combine both words and music, and prior to Machaut the form was more fluid, with examples ranging from Marie de France’s narrative lays through the troubadours and tournoyes to the lays set to music in the Roman de Fauvel.4 Indeed, in the view of at least one of Machaut’s readers, the beloved Toute Belle from the Voir Dit, ‘c’est chose de dit et de chant qui onques plus me plais’ [it is words set to music which I always like most of all].5 For, while Guillaume de Machaut was a prolific writer, it is his skill with both words and music which still sets him apart from his contemporaries.6 In terms of the lay, Machaut stands out as the most prolific composer of both words and music in this form.

In this chapter I will analyse the ordering of Guillaume de Machaut’s lays as they are presented in one of the six manuscripts which appear to contain his ‘complete-works’. That we have so many is testament to Machaut’s popularity during his lifetime and thereafter.7 All but one are elaborate presentation manuscripts, and even the miniatureless sixth, being for the most part a full-scale paper copy of one of the others, is not without visual appeal. Finally, all these manuscripts stand out for the consistency of the works they contain in both content and the order in which the works are presented. It is almost as if the packaging of Machaut’s oeuvre was on a similar scale of importance to medieval patrons and readers—and, indeed, perhaps the author—as the works themselves.8

Although the detailed relationships between these manuscripts remain essentially unclear, some links can be drawn between them. C has been dated as the earliest of the group, and its narrower range of contents supports this view. A and F–G are closely related in content and layout, but divided in time. Vg and B are so closely related that the latter is for the most part a less elaborate copy of the former. Finally, E stands on its own, the ‘odd’ manuscript which bears no direct relation to any one of the others but is indirectly related to all them.9

E is the largest of the group, and without doubt the manuscript which displays the highest degree of scribal virtuosity. Its large format and careful layout shows that the mise-en-page of each work was scrupulously planned. The Voir Dit, for example, is laid out in three columns, yet space was left for the forty-six letters to be written in cursive hand across the width of the folio, like ‘real’ letters, and also for the music to be notated across all three columns, without any ‘waste’ of text space. (For comparison, the two other ‘complete-works’ manuscripts to transmit this tale do so in two-column format throughout, without music, and with the letters written as prose within the columns.)10 Virtually all the works in E were copied into separate gatherings, so that the order in which the whole manuscript was presented could be decided at a later stage, with an index then drawn up.11 As one of the two posthumous ‘complete-works’ manuscripts, these differences have meant that E has been subject to charges of ‘unauthorised’ activities, and of deviating from the ‘official’ ordering and presentation of Machaut’s works. While it is also acknowledged that this does not diminish E’s value as a source, it is essential to remember that the homogeneity of the other Machaut sources is unusual for the time. Whatever can be argued for and against the poet-composer’s concern for the ordering and presentation of his works, the extent to which E follows or deviates from the format of the other ‘complete-works’ sources can be fruitfully analysed not as the product of a rebel workshop but as the careful arrangement of later scribal compilers working on an elaborate collection of the works of an illustrous and revered ‘poète’.12

The position of the lays in the ‘complete-works’ manuscripts, and within Machaut’s works, implies the importance of the genre to both the poet-composer and to the manuscript compilers (and therefore, presumably, also to the audience). In one of Machaut’s earlier works, the Remede de Fortune, the lay takes pride of place as the first and most accomplished (and also
arguably the most important) of the lyric genres to be presented within the
tale. In the later Voir Dit, a lay forms the central, pivotal point in the story,
as a punishment imposed upon the author-narrator figure by the allegorical
figure of Hope for his perceived neglect of her in this tale. Likewise, another
lay plays a role alongside two of Machaut's other works, the Jugement
dou Roy de Behaigne and the Jugement dou Roy de Navarre, where the poet is
commanded to write a lay ('Qui bien aiment') as a penance for the former
tale in which the judgment goes in favour of a knight against a lady.13 In
the music sections of the majority of the 'complete-works' manuscripts the
lays take their place at the head of the lyrics set to music, just as the genre
did in the Remede de Fortune.

It is worth dwelling a little on the fact that, although not all the lays
are set to music, they still appear as a group in the music section in all the
'complete-works' manuscripts. (Those lays not set to music are marked as
such in Tables 1 and 2 below.) This is in contrast with Machaut's other
lyric poems not set to music, now known as La Louange des Dames, which
form a section in their own right and whose position in the manuscripts
is less static. This suggests the confering of equal status, in the minds of
the manuscript compilers (and perhaps the author and audience), on all
Machaut's lays, whether or not they were set to music. Thus the music,
while far from incidental, does not define a lay, even in the music section
of the manuscripts. Analysis of the music of the lays neither supports nor
distorts the arguments presented here: in terms of the ordering of the lays
in the manuscripts, it was the texts which held sway.14

There are twenty-five lays in total across the 'complete-works'
manuscripts. Twenty-three of them appear in E, and nineteen of these are
grouped together in the music section and form the primary subject matter
of this article. The others are: the lay from the Voir Dit, 'Longuement me
suis tenus' (entitled in E 'Le Lay d'Esperance'), which in E is presented within
that tale; the lay from the Remede de Fortune, 'Qui n'aroit autre deport',
likewise presented within the tale; and 'Qui bien aiment', the poet's penance
doled out in Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre, which is placed after that
poem in E. Finally, E is alone in transmitting the lay 'Malgre Fortune'
presented as a text-only lay, despite being set to music in other sources
immediately following the Voir Dit.15 This lay, on the wiles of Fortune,
provides an unusual but fitting commentary to the end of the Voir Dit,
which sees the beloved Toute Belle (and, though significantly less negatively,
the lover) cast in the image of Fortune.16

With the lays holding such an important position, both in Machaut's
euvre and in the 'complete-works' manuscripts, we would expect to find
a carefully structured presentation and internal ordering within the section
of each manuscript devoted to the genre. While four of the six 'complete-
works' manuscripts employ an order for the lays which is virtually consistent
and probably chronological, two manuscripts do not fit this pattern. The

first of these is the early manuscript C, which for half of its lays does not
follow the order which became standard in later manuscripts. The order of
the lays in this manuscript has been analysed by Sylvia Huot and, like all
Machaut scholars since, I am indebted to her analysis (on which Table 1 is
dependent).17 The second manuscript not to fit the 'standard' pattern is the
posthumous E, already 'odd' in terms of its materiality (it is significantly
larger than its fellows, as previously mentioned), contents and layout, and for
its high number of variant readings. E diverges from the other manuscripts
from the second lay onwards, and until now an analysis of its ordering of
the lays has not been undertaken.

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<th>Table 1. Order of lays in the manuscripts (except E)</th>
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<td>C (c.1350)</td>
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<td>Each individual lay headed by a miniature.</td>
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<td>Only ms in which lays not at head of music section, though they were possibly intended to complete it.</td>
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<td>1. Loyauté que point ne delay (inspiratio from Loyalty)</td>
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<td>&quot;no music, but staves provided for first stanza&quot;</td>
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<td>2. J'aime la flour (meditatio)</td>
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<td>3. Pour ce qu'on puis (creative act, image of scroll)</td>
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<td>4. Aus amans (appeals to audience—lovers)</td>
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<td>5. Nuls ne doit (poet-protagonist, though this is not highlighted in imagery)</td>
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<td>6. Par trois raisons (poet-protagonist, again not highlighted in imagery)</td>
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<td>7. Amours doucement (love lay)</td>
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<td>8. Amis t'amour (love lay)</td>
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<td>&quot;no music&quot;</td>
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Before presenting an analysis of the order of lays in E we should first consider the patterns from which it deviates (see Table 1 above). The early 'complete-works' manuscript C (which, we must remember, was compiled when the poet-composer was around fifty, certainly not young for the time) follows an evidently carefully planned order of both lays and illuminations, with each lay bearing its own miniature (perhaps elevating them to a similar status as the longer works, a status unique to this manuscript). Huot has analysed this programme as being in two sections, the first opening with what she terms an 'extended prologue' of four lays and miniatures depicting the creative act of writing and its performance. The lover-protagonist of the lays, thus established, speaks first as a poet in the fifth and sixth lays and then as a lover in the seventh and eighth. The ninth lay in C, 'Un mortel lay', holds a similar position in both C and E, closing the end of the first section devoted to the genre (as Huot explains in detail, this may indicate a break in C's production precipitated by the death of Bonne de Luxembourg, who was perhaps the manuscript's intended recipient). This lay depicts the death of the poet-protagonist. At this point in C we have therefore come full circle: from poetic inspiration from loyalty to death through meates (slander).

Following this possible break comes 'Qui bien aime', in which a female voice mourns her dead lover. The accompanying image of male and female figures in conversation seems to provide a link to the other manuscripts (as yet unmade when C was being compiled) in which this lay is the poet-protagonist's reminiscence at the end of the debate poem Le Jugement dou Roy de Navarre for finding against ladies in the Jugement dou Roy de Béthancourt. In the following two lays the iconography of C extends for the first and only time into the margins of the page. The principal miniature accompanying each lay depicts the object of love, and the poetic voice stands to one side: the 'new', post-death arrangement of lays here seems to focus less on the lover-protagonist than on his (or, indeed, her) audience. In the thirteenth lay, 'Maintes fois', a female voice instructs her audience on the proper way to love. The fourteenth, 'On parle de richesse', is the only lay to change voice within the poem. The male voice speaks in long, grand lines of verse with even syllable counts, whereas the female voice speaks in shorter lines of uneven syllable counts, with their corresponding variation in stress offering more flexibility and fluidity. Here, then, the courtly lady's freedom provides a contrast to the clerical lover-protagonist. Rather than the scroll shown in the accompanying miniature elevating our male lover to the status of author, he is here bound by it, restricted by its weight and alienated outside the courtly lady's castle and her world. The final lay in C is in a neutral voice, but the accompanying miniature, the last miniature in the manuscript, is of a lady addressing other ladies, encouraging us to read it as female. Thus, at the end of the lays the male author-figure, normally concealed behind his persona of lover-protagonist, is not in evidence. The author is present behind the works in C—it is, after all, a single-author collection—but here
he is invisible, speaking only through his creations, themselves brought to us through a series of personae portrayed in both words and image. In C, in the lays section as well as the whole, it is the creation, rather than the creator, which we admire.

In contrast to C, the 'complete-works' manuscripts other than E place more emphasis on the author-creator figure. In the lay sections this is particularly apparent from the accompanying miniatures (when present), the order of the lays (which appears to be broadly chronological) and the exceptional clarity of the music presentation. In A the miniature shows the male lover-protagonist honouring ladies, as the first lay describes. Yet in this manuscript the protagonist is not as subservient as he appears. The manuscript contains an index which, in a rubric which is now well known, claims to reflect the order of works desired by the author himself. In the grand opening miniatures to A, Machaut the author promises Nature that he will write poems in honour of ladies: this miniature represents the fulfilment of that promise. In addition, this miniature introduces all the lays (and thus the music section), even those in a female voice, reminding us that they are the work of a single author. They are his to give.

In F–G the authorial presence in the lays is made even more explicit. In the opening miniature, the only miniature in the music section, there can be no doubt that the figure, seated at a lectern with an open book and a pen, is the author. The coat-of-arms of the newly identified patron is relegated to the background, and the curtain implies that we, the admiring audience, are being offered a privileged glimpse into the author's private sphere through the manuscript transmitting only his works. Add to this the clarity of the musical presentation and the chronological order of the lays, and we can see that this manuscript presents the lays as a lifetime's work to be appreciated.

Vg does not have an opening image in the lays section, although the elaborate initial letter (which occupies a space large enough to contain an image) and the condition of the folio suggest that the lays once began a separate volume. The miniatureless B, whose layout is in many ways virtually identical to that of the elaborate Vg, is missing the folio which would have opened the lays section, implying a similar degradation due to layout or (if it contained basic decoration) perhaps even a misappropriation by an avid collector. In both of these manuscripts the order of the lays is essentially the same as that in A and F–G.

It is against this background, then, that E is considered 'odd.' One important aspect which E shares with the other 'complete-works' manuscripts (with the exception of C), however, is the placement of the lays at the head of the music section, although in E the music section is placed centrally within the manuscripts, framed on either side by narrative dits, rather than at the end of the manuscript (or indeed as a separate volume), as in the other 'complete-works' sources. This leads us to view its opening lay and

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<th>Table 2. The order of the lays in E (c.1390).</th>
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Lays contained elsewhere in E:
Qui bien aiment (entitled 'Le Lay de Plour', after Le Jugement don Roy de Navare)
Qui n'aimoit autre depart (in the Remede de Fortune)
Longueil me su tenus (in the Voir Dit)
Malge Fortune (also entitled 'Le Lay de Plour', after the Voir Dit, presented in E without music)
miniature not just in the light of the lays which follow, but also in the light of the music section as a whole, which contains no further miniatures. This opening miniature portrays a group of men singing from or discussing the bound book held by their apparent leader. This reading, this performance, is clearly a group activity in which the participants engage with one another under the guidance of the book, and it is a fitting image for a manuscript, particularly one that contains music. However, there is no author-figure in this image, not even in his guise as lover-protagonist. Unlike the equivalent miniatures in other manuscripts, in this image the author is present, if indeed he is present at all, only through the presence and presentation of the material object of the book.

Certainly, the aural presence attested by the chronological ordering of the lays in the other manuscripts (apart from C) is not present. I would like to argue here that rather than this order being essentially random, as has been presumed (since the large format and virtuoso mise-en-page of E all but rule out the possibility of spacing issues), in fact a careful programme is at work.

Like the other manuscripts, E begins with the lay ‘Loyauté’, suggesting that its compilers may have been aware of the other programmes. Indeed, the rubric which accompanies this lay reads ‘Explicit le premier lay de Machaut’ (‘here ends Machaut’s first lay’) (f. 108v). This lay is a particularly fitting opening to the music portion (or volume) of a manuscript:

Loyauté,
Que point ne delay,
Vuet sans delay,
Que face un lay;
Et pour ce lay
Commencé […] (Lay 1 (E1))

[Loyalty, who never waits, wants me to write a lay straight away, and so I have begun …]

Indeed, the poet-persons speaking through the lay dedicates himself to love, with certain death—or at least certain melancholy (often bemoaned as a crueler fate for the courtly lover)—awaiting him at the end of every half stanza should his love (his work) be neglected. At the close of the lay, both his work and life are over: ‘Car ma vie et mon lay define’ (‘for I end my life and my lay’). In E alone does the stark singularity of the poetic voice contrast with the plurality of the miniature: we may choose to read and hear the lays, most of which are monophonic, as the work of an individual, whereas the miniature reminds us of the collective nature of making music and indeed manuscripts. It is arguable here that it is not in fact E which is ‘odd’, but the other ‘complete-works’ manuscripts, whose persistent emphasis on the author-figure of Machaut contrasts distinctly with their contemporaries.

The remaining eighteen lays in the music section of E fall into two groups of nine, each group comprising four pairs and a concluding lay, as depicted in Table 2 above. The first pair of the first group continue in the ‘public’ sphere, since they are both declaimed to an audience, the first from the masculine point of view, the second from the feminine. In the first of these, ‘Aus amans’, the poetic voice is once again a masculine poet writing a lay in the shadow of death:

Aus amans pour exemplaire
Vueil un lay retraire
De celle qui traire
Me fait tout contraire
Par un soustil regart traire
Qui a li amer m’amort
Que je ne m’en puis retraire
Eins m’en lay detraire
Pouf s’amour attraire
Que me vuet deffeire
S’autrement ne li puis plaire
Dont jugies me tieng a mort. (Lay 4 (E2))

[To lovers, as an example, I wish to write a lay of reproach to her who holds me against my will with a wily look that commits me to enduring love of her. Rather I grow distracted by trying to win her love which seeks to undo me. If I otherwise cannot please her I will be condemned to death.]

Like ‘Loyauté’, this lay ends with a death-bed appeal to the lady, and the repetition of the ‘lay/delay’ rhyme only serves to accentuate this:

Receves mon lay …
Sachiez que vous estes celle
Pour qui je muir sans delay. (Lay 4 (E2))

[Receive my lay … Be aware that you are she for whom I am about to die.]

In contrast, the feminine voice of the third lay, ‘Amours se plus’, proclaims to her audience her joy: in this manuscript, the first joy that we have seen or heard in a lay.

The next pair move from the public arena into the private chamber, beginning with ‘Se quanque Dieu’, in which a female voice endures the
bittersweet nature of being in love yet separated from her lover. This lay is given a title only in this manuscript through the following rubric: ‘Explicit le lay du miroir amoureux Machaut’ [Here ends the lay of Machaut’s Mirror of Love], f. 110’. Such a title immediately brings to mind the subtitle of that medieval ‘best-seller’, the Roman de la Rose, even if the imagery of the lay itself does not explicitly reference this work.22 The second lay in this pair, ‘J’aime la flour’, is a private masculine lament. In the other manuscripts this lament follows ‘Loyauté’, yet, despite rhymes on ‘-ay’, it does not reuse the imagery of the poet writing his lay. Indeed, its placement in second position in the other manuscripts could be argued as representing the meditatio stage of poetic composition, which follows immediately after an inspiratio from the allegorical figure ‘Loyauté’.23 Whereas the depiction of poetic creation fits with the author reverence as portrayed to a greater or lesser extent in the other manuscripts, this is not the case in E. By putting in second place a lay which shares the imagery of ‘Loyauté’, and moving this lay into the private sphere, the author-figure and his process of creation are even further displaced.

This trend continues into the third pair, which are both masculine laments: ‘Nuls ne droit’ and ‘Amours doucement’. The first nine stanzas (of twelve) of ‘Nuls ne droit’ bemoan the necessity to lament, and in the tenth stanza we find that the speaker in fact rejects poetry: ‘Pour ce entrelas/ Chans et lais…’ [Consequently I forsake songs and lays…]. Of course, this statement is essentially contradictory, since readers and listeners, particularly of a ‘complete-works’ manuscript, know very well that there is an author present; yet, when taken within the emerging author-effacing context of E, a more literal reading is encouraged. This continues in ‘Amours doucement’, a lay which Huot has described as ‘a pure articulation of love’.24 Like ‘J’aime la flour’, this lay plays with concepts of loyalty and death, but avoids any mention of the protagonist’s métier, thus estranging itself from the authorial dedication to duty of the opening lay.

However, the author-figure, the first-person poet, can never be far away in the works of Machaut, and the final pair of lays in the first section opens with ‘Pour ce qu’on puis’25. This lay is headed with the rubric ‘Ien un autre lay Machaut’, and is a lay which Huot describes as depicting the creative act.25 The claim in the opening stanza that ‘Je veul faire avant me mort/ Un lay dou mal qui me mor’ [Before I die, I wish to write a lay on the evil which afflicts me] is accompanied in C by a miniature of a figure writing on a scroll. In all the manuscripts other than E this lay takes its place as part of what Huot terms the ‘extended prologue’ which establishes Machaut as the poet-composer behind the collection.26 Nevertheless, by dividing and separating this opening series of lays in the other manuscripts, E displaces as far as is possible the notion of the author. (Once again it can be noted that, while this displacement of the author-figure makes E ‘odd’ among the Machaut manuscripts, the net result of such comparative effacement is by no means ‘odd’ for the late fourteenth century.) The partner to ‘Pour ce qu’on puis’ in E is a relatively uncomplexed lay about love in a feminine voice, ‘Amis r’amoir’. While one must hesitate to overlook the subtleties in any of Machaut’s works, the comparative simplicity of this feminine lay serves to quell, as far as is possible, any authorial curiosity aroused in its predecessor.

At the halfway point in the lay section E continues its efforts to efface the author-figure by, literally, killing him off. The idea of the wronged lover wishing to die from grief is one which occurs frequently in Machaut’s lays, yet only in ‘Un mortel lay’ (entitled ‘Le Lay mortel’ in A and F–G) is it taken to an extreme, as its opening and closing lines show:

Un mortel lay vuelt commencer
Et a tous amans annoncier
Comment Amours me vuelt traier…

S’en chant en mon jour darrenier
‘Dame, mort m’ont, sans menacier
Vostre doue oueil, vostre dangeir
Et votre amour que chier compere.’ (Lay 12 (E10))

[I wish to begin a mortal lay and tell all lovers how love chooses to treat me…
… Yet on my dying day I sing ‘Lady, this is no threat. Your sweet gaze, your domination and your dearly bought love have killed me.’]

Whereas in C this lay completed the circle from the establishment of the figure of the poet-lover figure practising his art, in E it retains a central position but acquires quite a different function. Following the dismantling of the ‘extended prologue’ and the consequent attempt to efface the author, the death of the protagonist in E can be taken much more at face value. E is, after all, and in contrast to C, a posthumous collection which belonged to a living patron, Jean, duc de Berry, bibliophile and son of the French king.27 In addition, and perhaps more significantly, this break in the lay section is reminiscent of the (purported) death of Guillaume de Lorris at the end of the first section of the Roman de la Rose, whereupon the narrative is taken up by Jean de Meun.28 As Huot has noted, the death of the author ‘reflects the lyric identification of singer and song, extended to the lyrical writer and his corpus’.29 Unlike in C, where the break in the lay section may indicate the death of the manuscript’s intended recipient, here in the posthumous manuscript E (which has thus far sought to eliminate the author-figure as far as possible) the ‘death’ is much more along the lines of the equivalent event in the Rose. Although the authorial change in the Rose could be fictitious, the death of Machaut in 1377, some ten to fifteen years prior to the
compilation of E, was not. Thus E seems to have quite a different agenda from its fellow 'complete-works' sources.

The opening lay to the second group clearly suggests new beginnings:

Ne say comment commercier
Un tres doux lay
Pour bon Amour mercier
De l'espoir qu'ay
Et pour ma dame au corps gay
Gloirefer
Et lor
Car trop po scay
Pour telle ouvrer edifier. (Lay 14 (E11))

[I don't know how to begin a sweet lay to thank kind Love
for the hope I have and to glorify and praise my blithe lady,
for I know too little to construct such a work.]

Even though there is no new author, unlike in the Rose, the author-figure appears to have taken a new direction: instead of melancholy, we have joy in hope. Indeed, this lay promises in its closing lines that this is now the author-figure's métier:

Or li vuelle Amours noncier
Que porteray
Dedens mon cuer sans trichier
Et serviray
Sa douce ymage et l'aray
Plus que moy chier
Et tant com durer porray
Ne feray autre mestier. (Lay 14 (E11))

[Now I wish to proclaim the love that I will carry faithfully
in my heart, and serve the sweet image which I will cherish
more than myself. And for as long as I can survive, this will
remain my work.]

Like the first group of lays in E, this second group proceeds in pairs.
This opening lay, then, is answered by the first of the Marian lays in the manuscript, 'Contre ce doux moi de maî' (entitled in E 'Un lai de notre dame'). Instead of praising an earthly lady, the poet-composer in his new guise praises the Virgin Mary, 'Dame, digne d'estre honnorée' ['Lady, worthy of being honoured'] [Lay 15 (E12)]. Although this lay ends on a note of death, it speaks of the hope of heavenly pity in response to faithful service to the mother of God. We have come a long way from the languid self-pity of 'Un lai motre'.

The second pair of lays in the second section reflects the previous pair, with the essential difference that this time it is a feminine poet who is answered by a Marian lay (again, in E the Marian lay is highlighted by the title 'Un lay de nostre dame'; in F–G this lay is entitled 'Le Lay de la fontaine'). Indeed, these two lays, 'S'onques doleureuse' and 'Je ne cesse de priere', can be read together as a contrast between Fortune and the Virgin. Whereas the feminine poet in 'S'onques doleureuse' takes comfort from Fortune in Hope, the (presumably masculine) poet in 'Je ne cesse de priere' begins as if praising an earthly lady, only revealing in the third stanza the true object of his devotion and ensuing joy. The reader (or listener) to both of these pairs of lays does not have to dwell very long to understand that the Virgin brings comfort like no other lady.

The third pair of lays in the second section contrasts two facets of a masculine poet speaking to an audience: lamentation ('Par tres raisons') and praise ('Pour ce que plus'). Whereas 'Par tres raisons' can be found in all the 'complete-works' manuscripts, 'Pour ce que plus' is the first of the two unica lays in E. While 'Par tres raisons' sees the author-figure wavering in his promise of praise, the effect is immediately negated by 'Pour ce que plus', which is entitled 'Un lay de consolation'. This tension continues in the final pair of lays in E, which, as we have seen, also occur together in the same penultimate position in C: 'On parle de richesses', with its cleric-ly courtly contrast, and the feminine, didactic 'Mainots fois'. Therefore, the second group of lays moves from love and comfort in Marian devotion to a lamenting poet, before obliterating any remaining trace of the author-figure by turning to the feminine, courtly voice, as in C.

The concluding lay to this section is the unicum 'En demandant'. Like 'Un mortel lay', which ended the first section, its voice is that of a poet writing, and the opening stanza tells of grief and sorrow such as have never before been written about:

En demandant
Et lamentant
Vuell commencier un lay
Triste et dolent
Chanter d'un chant
Par droit tel le feray
Quar je ne scay
Escript en vray
Qu'onques cuers eust tant
De grief emaya
Si comme j'ay
Ne de duel si pesant ... (Lay 24 (E19))


Voy trebuchant
Le [sic] gent ...

Les biens que j'ay
Ou que j'aray
Fortune, or as fait tant
Que tout lairay
Et chanteray
'Joie, a Dieu te command': (Lay 24 (E19))

[I must turn my high song to tears, desist from fine speech
and abandon my muse ...
Nature wills it that I am strong enough to have lived to turn
grey. And Fortune is wrong to torment me as one dies, the
other is taken captive, I see sturdy people stumbling ...
Fortune, you have ensured that I will renounce all the gifts
that I have or ever will have and sing ‘Joy, I bid you Adieu!’]

In this ending, our author-figure is abandoned again and renounces his
gifts, this time in favour of his grief for, and service to, the house of France.
Certainly, a more fitting conclusion of the lays in this manuscript cannot
easily be imagined.

It has been my intention in this analysis to demonstrate the considerable
internal unity of the lays of E, and to go some way towards lifting the weight
of 'oddness' from this manuscript. The complex relations between E and
the other 'complete-works' manuscripts, together with its high number of
variants, mean that it remains the son of many fathers, pour ainsi dire, yet
it is far from being compiled without careful consideration of its contents.
It thus stands out from its fellows through the reasoning behind its structure as
much as through the structure itself. I have shown here how, like C, E can be
linked to the house of France, having been designed, to paraphrase Deborah
McGrady, to attract the patron's gaze, albeit at the cost of the author.21
The presentation of the lays in this manuscript seems to be a concerted attempt
to subdue the author-figure in favour of the patron, as far as is possible in a
single-author 'complete-works' manuscript. For E is first and foremost a
presentation manuscript, with great importance throughout placed on the
visual beauty of its contents, even at what might be considered as the
cost of accuracy and authority. However, if we leave these two seemingly
problematical concepts to one side, as it seems did E's compilers, then it can
take its place alongside the other 'complete-works' Machaut manuscripts,
no longer the unreliable 'odd one out', but a carefully presented and finely
constructed work of art.

[Entreated and lamenting I wish to begin a sad and
sorrowful lay, to sing a fitting song, such that truly to
my knowledge its match has not been written, for no
heart has ever had as much grief as I have, nor such heavy
sorrow ...]

The insistence on the novelty of the writing of such sorrow elevates the
grief of this lays above that of 'Un mortel lay'; the mourning here is of
greater magnitude even than that for the author-figure. In the second stanza
we learn that the grief is caused by the death of 'le roi de fierete/Fleur de
chrestiente' ['the proud king, flower of Christianity']. He is described in
the stanzas which follow as 'Assietre et hardi' ['assured and brave'], 'Lion
de nobilitie' ['lion of nobility'], 'Sanglier hardi et creste' ['brave and proud
warrior' (signified by a tufted or razorback boar in heraldry]), and as the 'roy
de droiture' ['king of righteousness'] who is imbued with 'vaillance hardi'
['courageous valour']. These descriptors could indicate a reference to that
great epitome of chivalry, Jean de Luxembourg, who was Machaut's early
patron. Jean was the father of the likely recipient of C, Bonne de Luxembourg,
and grandfather of Jean de Berry, the known owner of manuscript
E. If this is a lay in Jean's honour, then this would be the only mention in
Machaut's works of the death of the king at the disastrous battle of Crécy in
1346. Perhaps towards the end of Machaut's life, after the death of Bonne's
husband king Jean II of France in 1364 and three years later the definitive
return to France from England of the hostages, including his son Jean de
Berry, the time was finally right to honour the chivalric king whose family
could hope for brighter times ahead. Indeed, this lay closes with expressions
of service, of the ageing of the poet and of dedication to God:

Me fault et convient devourer ...
Mon haut chanter
Metre en plourer
Mon bel patier
Et mon rimer
Laisser et tourner a rebours ...

Par naturel poe
Sui si fort
Que je port
Cheveux gris
Et Fortune a tort
Me remort
Quar l'un mort
L'autre pris.